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ABSTRACT

An evaluation of the "Talking about Touching" personal safety (1996 editions) curricula for Preschool/Kindergarten and Grades 1-3 was conducted to determine the extent to which students retained information and effectively demonstrated the skills taught in the program and to gather feedback from practitioners using the program to guide the final revisions of the 1996 editions. Students participating in the evaluation were from eight urban, rural, and suburban elementary schools in Washington state. There were 48 preschool/kindergarten students, 22 first graders, 30 second graders, and 33 third graders. These students were taught by 10 classroom teachers and 2 school counselors. Student knowledge and teacher attitudes were assessed through interviews and surveys. The evaluation showed significant improvements in students' safety knowledge and skill after receiving the curriculum at all grades. Students were better able to indicate strategies to prevent and handle dangerous situations and potentially abusive situations. Students' perceived competence in using safety skills was initially high, and increased significantly only for kindergartners. Teachers found the program easy to implement, relevant, and effective. (Contains two tables and four references.) (SLD)

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Talking About Touching™: Personal Safety Curricula (1996 editions)
Preschool to Grade 3
Curriculum Evaluation Summary

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ED 426 142

Children face a host of potentially dangerous and abusive situations, including bullying, harassment, and access to firearms. Moreover, the sexual abuse of children occurs at the rate of more than one in five children (Elliott & Briere, 1994). Many of these dangerous situations can be prevented by using self-protection and assertiveness skills.

Recent research has shown that preschool and elementary-aged children can learn personal safety concepts and skills (Wurtele, Marrs, & Miller-Perrin, 1987; Finkelhor & Strapko, 1992). The most effective approach for teaching these skills includes instruction in specific skills over time, frequent opportunities for skill practice, and parent involvement (Finkelhor, Asdigian, & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995; Wurtele et al., 1987).

Program description

Talking About Touching is a personal safety curriculum that teaches children self-protection and assertiveness skills to reduce their vulnerability to harm and abuse. This comprehensive program is developmentally sequenced and designed to be taught in the classroom over a period of six to eight weeks. Topics include safety rules for riding in the car and responding in a fire, as well as handling inappropriate touching and responding to strangers. The program presents the concepts through a variety of media (i.e., video, story and audio cassette, poster) and involves discussion, skill practice, and transfer of training (e.g., classroom activities, take-home information sheets). Parent involvement is highly encouraged. Lessons last 10-20 minutes depending on the grade level and lesson.

Purpose of evaluation

An evaluation study of the *Talking About Touching* personal safety curricula (1996 editions) for Preschool/Kindergarten and Grades 1-3 was conducted for two purposes: (1) to determine the extent to which students retained the information and effectively demonstrated the skills taught in the program; and (2) to gather feedback from practitioners using the program to guide the final revision process of the 1996 editions.

Methods

Students participating in the study were from eight elementary schools in western Washington. The schools included urban, suburban, and rural schools, and reflected a range of ethnic diversity (range = 20% - 80% Caucasian) and socioeconomic status (i.e., percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch; range = 10% - 90%). Forty-eight students were in preschool/kindergarten (Pre/K; sampled from 1 preschool and 5 kindergarten classes), 22 in first grade (2 first grades, 1 first/second grade split class), 30 in second grade (4 second grades, 1 first/second grade split), and 33 in third grade (2 classes). About half the students were girls (see Table 1 for gender breakdown by grade).

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Linda Garnett
Comm. for Children

UD032694

Table 1. *Sample n's by grade and sex.*

Grade	Girls	Boys
Preschool/Kindergarten	25	23
First	10	12
Second	16	14
Third	16	17
Total	67	66

The program implementors were ten teachers and two school counselors; all but one of them were women. The implementors[1] received training in the curriculum prior to teaching it; in most cases, training was done less than a month before the implementation. Two of the teachers had taught the program before. Nearly all of the teachers had previously used role plays as an instructional strategy.

The program was implemented over approximately eight weeks. Lessons were presented to the entire class; however, only students whose parents gave written consent took part in the student interview. Students in the study were interviewed within approximately two weeks prior to and two weeks following the curriculum implementation.[2] The two female interviewers were trained Committee for Children staff. Interviews took place in a semi-private place in the schools.

The interview included questions regarding the specific safety skills presented in the program, assessing both comprehension and behavioral skills. For example, comprehension items included "What are all the things you should do to cross a street safely?" and "What should you do if someone tries to touch your private body parts when it's not okay?" Items that assessed behavioral skill involved the presentation of several large photographs depicting two different hypothetical scenarios (e.g., a stranger drives up to a boy and offers him a ride home); students were then asked to demonstrate what the child in each story should do. Assessment of skill involved students' verbal responses as well as their body language and tone of voice.

In addition, perceived competence and anxiety regarding personal safety skills was assessed, each with a single item. The two questions were: "How good [are] you at keeping yourself safe?" and "How do you feel inside about learning safety rules?" Responses were indicated on a four-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = not good at all, to 4 = very good; and 1 = not at all scared, to 4 = very scared, respectively). Finally, students were asked if they had previously learned about personal safety in school.

Credit was given for plausible answers, in addition to those explicitly presented in the program. The comprehension score was the total number of correct knowledge items. The behavioral skill score involved four-part answers for each scenario (i.e., summary response [accept vs. refuse], body language, voice tone, and verbal message) for a maximum of four points possible per scenario. The summary knowledge and skill score was a sum of the comprehension and behavioral skill scores. Perceived competence and anxiety indices were simply the rating given for that item.

Teachers were asked to complete brief evaluations for each lesson. Using a six-point Likert scale, teachers were asked to rate each lesson's ease of use, importance for students, and effectiveness in teaching the concepts and skills, and the utility of the supplementary activities. In addition, teachers were asked to rate their comfort level with teaching the

[1] Program implementors will be referred to as "teachers" from here on.

[2] Due to implementation and scheduling difficulties, posttests were not conducted in two classes (the single preschool class and a second grade class).

lesson, and students' comfort level, interest, and comprehension. Open-ended questions were also included to solicit recommendations for improving each lesson. An overall curriculum evaluation questionnaire was given, with a similar format and questions. The curriculum survey was followed by an interview with the curriculum developer to obtain in-depth information, with a particular focus on recommendations for improving the program.

Results

Student knowledge and behavioral skill. A 4 (Grade) by 2 (Sex) by 2 (Test Time) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, with Test Time as the repeated measure, and knowledge and skill summary score as the dependent variable. A significant main effect was found for Test Time, $F(1, 97) = 129.58$, $p < .001$. Students achieved significantly higher scores at time 2. In addition, the Grade by Test Time interaction was significant, $F(3, 97) = 42.88$; $p < .001$. Subsequent paired comparisons within grade showed students in all grades improved significantly from time 1 to time 2 (all p's $< .001$; see Table 2 for change scores by grade).[3] Thus, students at each grade level achieved a significantly higher summary score after receiving the curriculum compared to their score before being taught the program.

The most challenging item for students was recalling how to handle appropriate touching. Students were required to state three actions (i.e., say "no", run away, tell someone) to obtain credit for the item. Most students (93.4%) were able to recall one action for the interviewer, 69.8% recalled two actions, and 23.6% recalled all three actions.

Another item that was difficult was recalling what to do if an initial request for a touching problem was ignored. Other challenging items at specific grade levels were: recalling what to do if lost (Pre/K), crossing the street safely (Pre/K and Grade 1), handling phone calls at home if alone (Grade 2), walking around traffic safely (Grade 3), and fire safety skills (Pre/K, Grades 1 and 2).

Student perceived competence. Students' perceived competence was moderately high (M's = 3.60-3.65) for all grade levels at pretest. A 4 (Grade) by 2 (Test Time) repeated measures ANOVA indicated no significant main effects for grade or sex. However, a significant Grade by Test Time interaction was found, $F(3, 95) = 3.16$; $p < .05$. In subsequent paired comparisons, perceived competence significantly improved over time for the Pre/K group only ($p < .01$; see Table 2 for change scores by grade). The Sex by Test Time interaction approached significance.

Student anxiety . Anxiety levels at pretest were moderately low (M's = 1.53 - 2.13). A 4 (Grade) by 2 (Sex) by 2 (Test Time) repeated measures ANOVA indicated no significant effects.

Student prior experience . At time 1, 80% of the students overall (i.e., 70%, 70%, 84%, and 94% of students in Pre/K, Grade 1, 2, and 3, respectively) indicated they had previously learned about safety skills in school.

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[3] Recall that within the Pre/K group, posttests were collected only for kindergartners.

Table 2. *Change scores by grade.*

Grade and measure	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Preschool/Kindergarten				
Knowledge and behavioral skill	39	5.42	3.90	8.69***
Perceived competence	37	.38	.83	2.78**
Grade 1				
Knowledge and behavioral skill	18	4.94	3.76	5.57***
Perceived competence	18	.11	1.02	.46
Grade 2				
Knowledge and behavioral skill	18	2.94	2.06	6.07***
Perceived competence	18	-.17	.62	-1.14
Grade 3				
Knowledge and behavioral skill	30	1.82	2.11	4.71***
Perceived competence	30	-.23	1.04	-1.23

Note. Negative change scores reflect a reduction in perceived competence or anxiety.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Evaluation of the program.[4] Teachers indicated the training was highly worthwhile ($M = 2.17$) and they felt well-prepared to implement the program ($M = 1.57$). Lessons were reportedly easy to prepare ($M = 1.17$); in particular, the lesson cards made the presentation and discussion of the material straightforward ($M = 1.17$). They found the manual useful ($M = 2.60$), particularly the resource material and activity sheets to give families. Although teachers reported integration was not difficult ($M = 1.75$), only half reported actually doing it. These teachers either included related material with the program or integrated the program into other areas of the academic curriculum.

Teachers found the concepts developmentally appropriate for their students ($M = 1.57$) and the lessons effective in teaching the concepts ($M = 1.71$) and stimulating discussion ($M = 1.71$). Students easily comprehended the lessons and concepts presented ($M = 1.33$). Guiding students in role-playing was reportedly easy for teachers ($M = 1.43$). In general, students were able to demonstrate the relevant skills during skill practices ($M = 2.08$).

Teachers indicated a high degree of comfort teaching the program ($M = 1.14$). Likewise, students showed a high level of comfort with and interest in the lessons ($M = 1.50, 1.57$ respectively) as reported by teachers. Rapport and trust were reportedly easy to establish ($M = 1.50$). One teacher mentioned that when the program was started half-way through the year, rapport and trust had already been established, making it easier to approach the material. Teachers reported a fair degree of support from their administration and from parents ($M's = 4.71, 4.17$, respectively). The two teachers who used the parent video in their implementation reported it was quite helpful to parents ($M = 1.00$) and that parents consequently endorsed the video ($M = 5.50$). All of the teachers indicated they plan to use the program again with future classes.

[4] These results are based on the seven completed questionnaires. The remainder were either missing or incomplete.

Discussion

The evaluation study showed significant improvement in kindergarten through third-grade students' safety knowledge and skill after receiving the *Talking About Touching* curriculum. Although most of the students had received prior classroom-based instruction in safety, they were significantly more skilled after being taught *Talking About Touching*. Students were better able to indicate strategies to prevent and handle dangerous situations (e.g., bicycle and fire safety) as well as abusive situations (e.g., bullying, inappropriate touching).

Students' perceived competence at using safety skills was initially quite high. Only the kindergarten group significantly increased in perceived competence after receiving the program, which was not surprising given the high initial levels. In addition, students did not evidence significant reductions in anxiety. Again, this was not unexpected in light of the low initial levels.

Teachers found the program easy to implement, yet relevant and effective in teaching students safety skills. Moreover, they were quite enthusiastic about the content and structure of the program and planned to use it again. Both administrators and parents were fairly supportive, particularly those parents who viewed the parent video.

A high level of support was given to the overall curriculum and lessons as they were written. Teachers' comments regarding specific lessons, activities, and discussion questions were instrumental in the final revision of the program. The revisions involved the substitution of several photographs, changing the sequence of some lessons, and revising the wording in some of the lesson scripts. However, the fundamental concepts and teaching strategies of the program remained unchanged.

In summary, the current evaluation study of the *Talking About Touching* curricula for preschool through third grade suggests that the program is helpful in improving young children's safety knowledge and skill. The study also provided evidence of educators' support for the program and its merit in teaching children safety skills.

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